

1Ashley Bartlett

Tape #043

This is an interview with Mr. Ashley Bartlett, 2185 N. 3500 W. Vernal, Utah, on the 20th day of September, 1977. This is Mike Brown of the Golden Age Center.

Mike Brown (MB): Mr. Bartlett, you told me that you're the oldest Vernal native.

Ashley Bartlett (Ashley): I'm the oldest native-born man in the valley. There was five children born before I was, but all of them have gone. For almost forty years I've been the oldest native born here.

MB: Were you born during the Hard Winter?

Ashley: No, I followed the Hard Winter. The Hard Winter was [18]79 and '80 and I was born in '80 on the 19th day of April.

MB: It was right at the end then.

Ashley: Yeah.

MB: Did your parents ever talk about that winter? Did you hear people talk about it?

Ashley: Always. Somebody would come to our place and talk about the Hard Winter. You see, everything died, the cattle all died, but my father had good fortune. One day a man came in the spring after the Hard Winter and said, "Mr. Bartlett, I believe you still have a yoke of oxen." They had drifted down to Ashley Creek, east of what is now Naples. There was a very large grove of cottonwood trees and the leaves had fallen down and the two oxen had got into that grove and there they would paw the leaves and paw down to the leaves through the snow and they lived. This was in March. This man said he believed that was his pair of oxen. That's the only thing that lived. Our cows and the horses all died. So, he went down there, the snow was shoe-top deep still, and found the oxen. And, of course, then our farm was just a half of a mile straight south of Vernal, just a half a mile. And then our farm was a half a mile square, a quarter section. When he got to a part where the oxen could pick enough to eat, he bring them up to the farm. After the snow all went out, the grass came up, he'd hitch 'em up and hitch on to the plow and maybe plow a half a dozen furrows and have to quit because they were give out. But after a little while they would gradually get strength and he was able to put in a crop. That's our home was a half a mile from town and a half a mile square.

MB: Did they ever talk about the sickness that winter?

Ashley: Well, my mother was a nurse. She was nurse everywhere. They even took her up on the mountain. Mother was a natural nurse and she was always on the go. That was all my life, young life, was mother going somewhere to wait on the sick.

MB: Was that kind of a calling for her?

Ashley: Well, she was president of the Relief Society, and the Relief Society people had to be the doctors and the undertakers and everything. Mother, as president of the Relief Society, would go, she was willing to go, that was the main thing. And that was a constant thing. She and my oldest sister, Paula, in my mother's footsteps in the Uintah Reservation, was the community nurse. Mother was the type, if there was sickness, she would go right there. She didn't have to wait to be asked to go. That was her disposition. And she would stay as long as she had to stay. Of course, she had to walk everywhere she went. One of her counselors lived half a mile, and she would have to walk to take her home and walk back that half a mile in the night. All of that was her disposition. But the Relief Society all over this part of the country in those days were the undertakers. That's the church calling of a Relief Society person. If there's any death or sickness, the Relief Society has to take over.

MB: I guess they didn't have any doctors back then.

Ashley: There were no doctors at all for years.

MB: Did your mother know remedies and things?

Ashley: Well, she had to learn what she could learn from other people. But the main thing with her is the help she give and the encouragement.

MB: Do you remember your earliest impressions of Vernal? What it was like here?

Ashley: Well, the earliest recollection I have... You see, we were a half a mile from town and I hated to have to go to town because I had to go barefoot, and the prickly pears were everywhere and I had to pick my way. That stands in my mind as a part of life. First my oldest sister, I'd have to say, "Nell, you have to carry me because I'm footed." But after a while she'd say, "It's no harder for you to get between the prickly pears than it is for me." Because she was barefooted, too, the best part of the time. You see, a half a mile from town and we had nothing but the wagon roads and that was way along in my life.

MB: What did you do for fun when you were a boy?

Ashley: Every night of the world we kids would be out running foot races or some games because it wasn't long 'til there was people all around us that had children of my age. The Ashtons, the Bennions, the Calders, the Johnsons, all the people had children of my age and we had games and foot racing up and down the roads. Then we got swings. We didn't have anything for a long time in the trees that you could hitch on for a swing. But the games everybody wanted to get in. We never played ball. That's strange. In the winter skating. The water used to come down into Vernal on the main street of Vernal, as the Main Street going west. The water would

fill all over there and the whole place would be a skating pond and I remember that was right next to the schoolhouse. The schoolhouse was on the north side of Main Street in Vernal. School would let out, skating was our main excitement in the winter.

I remember one day my oldest brother came home with his face scratched 'til you couldn't put your finger on his face without.... He had a little willow and an older boy came skating by him and he put the willow out and that stopped the skater and that made him fall down, and he whirled right around and come and got my brother and sat on him and scratched until he was just blood. He and my brother next, of course, made up their mind that one of these days they'd find that man that did the scratching and would pay him back, his own kind. But the man took sick and died, and afterwards the first thing I heard, George was crying and he said to Bart, "So and so is dead." Then he said how glad they were they didn't ever scratch his face up.

But we didn't play any ball 'til quite late in my life, until the Central School, the brick Central School. We used to go to school, of course, in the old log cabin right close to where the motel is, right about where the post office is only a little east of where the post office is. That was our schoolhouse.

I can remember in the winters, two winters, that the water spread all over and everybody was skating. Then that winter it was quite snowy and my two brothers got blacksmiths to build us a cutter, like the regular boughten cutters with the big curved dashboard to catch the snow that the horses would kick up. That was the main excitement then, was sleigh riding.

I can remember now when our first floor was dirt floor, and they used to wash it every day. I've thought since, she would wash the floor and it would keep us outside until it dried. Of course, that was in the summertime, but our house had dirt roof, dirt floor. Then I remember when first lumber came, and instead of putting it on the roof to start with, Father put it on the floor. It wasn't planed, it was rough lumber, but we planed it with our feet. Then next from that was to put lumber overhead so that when it rained, water didn't come through. Our home was two log cabins and then a lean-to on the east end. Then when the first sawmill came in, Father was anxious to get lumber to build a house. Our house wasn't one of the first of the better class, but it became the kind of center place, two stories, and instead of the eaves going out, they were cut off, all four eaves. It stands there today, just a half a mile south of Vernal on that side, that house with the eaves cut off, and it was the point that everybody would refer to.

MB: Was that Vernal Avenue?

Ashley: I suppose. It's the one right straight south of the center of Vernal. It's a half a mile south. That house stands there today. It was one of the best houses. Hacking had a lot better house west of us, but our house for years was the most noticeable house in that part of this country. Eight rooms.

But now coming back to Mother. With this home, Mother went every direction as a nurse. I have one story that I would repeat occasionally. When Mother and Father were married in 1868, they were married in what is called the Endowment House. There wasn't any temple in Salt Lake, but they had a house they called the Endowment House, and there they were married. Father had fifty cents in money. Mother, all she had for a wedding gown was a cheap calico dress. After they were married, they went out on, it is now North Temple, the Endowment House was on North Temple in Salt Lake. They were walking only a block and a half from the Endowment House where they were married and a man drove up beside them with a foxy team and buggy. Of course, my father and mother were very poor. But this man drove right up and

stopped them and asked them to get in his buggy. Then he drove right straight to his home and asked his wife to improvise a wedding dinner for them. You see, my mother with her cheap calico dress, this man was a wealthy man, a beautiful team and buggy.

Many, many years afterwards, I came home from school from the Academy and found my Mother in bitter tears. When Mother cried, something had happened. I said to Mother, "What on earth, what on earth?" It took, I suppose, a half an hour for my mother to calm herself so she could tell me why she was crying. But now you know that the Relief Society were the undertakers in those days. She got word that a man had died way over in the northeast corner of the valley, and, of course, as soon as she heard that there was a man dead there, she had to go. Then when she got to the ratty green ranch, his wife said the man's body is in the chicken coop. The chicken coop had been abandoned as a chicken coop, but this man had died in the chicken coop, wrapped up in two old ragged quilts. When she removed the quilt from his face, it was the man that drove up to them in his buggy and took them in. His name was Charlie Decker. He was one of Brigham Young's sons-in-law.

Charles Decker. It was he that drove his foxy team, as my father was his hired man. Father had to help take care of the church cattle and Charlie Decker was the man in charge of the cattle and he had my father employed. That's why he stopped when he saw that Father was married. He hadn't heard that he was to be married, and he drove up to take Father and my mother in his foxy carriage. Now when we were in our glorious home and surroundings, and for her to go to wait on a dead man, and that man was Charlie Decker.

MB: That was quite a shock.

Ashley: No, here's the end of it. He made Riley Green promise, that's the man who owned the place, that when he was buried, he would get the finest team that he could find anywhere, and hitch them up to ?, that he could drive to the cemetery at a full tilt, the horses traveling at their fastest gait. Now in those days, the water ditches crossed the road and there was a bridge and a bridge and a bridge. Now I was in that wagon, helped to hold his body, and when we went over the bridges, the coffin would go way up and my two brothers were holding; we had one of the neighbor's teams. So my mother saw that man laid to rest, but the bitterness when she saw who was dead and thinking back to the day when he drove up beside them on the street and had them get in his carriage and took them to his home and had his wife improvise a wedding dinner for them, all to the embarrassment of my mother. Of course, my father didn't care so much. Now to find that character at her mercy as undertaker, was more than she could stand.

MB: That's quite a story.

Ashley: I was sexton in the Vernal Cemetery for five years. I remodeled the cemetery completely. I had learned about it over in Carbon County, and when I came home I was made sexton. One of the first graves I located was the grave of Charlie Decker. Not long after I located it, relatives of Charlie Decker came and they didn't care whether it was ever taken care of or not. I felt just a little tinge of heat in my mind since I knew who Charlie Decker was and his connection with our family.

MB: Now, I was talking to Clark Goodrich last week, he told me to ask you if you remembered him. He said he worked with you.

Ashley: What's his work?

MB: Clark Goodrich? Do you want me to hand this to you?

Ashley: No, look on the bottom of it.

MB: It says A.M. Goodrich.

Ashley: Albert.

MB: Albert. Is that his brother?

Ashley: Yeah.

MB: This is really something.

Ashley: He made this an...

MB: Does it just sit there like that?

Ashley: One of the younger brothers came and brought that to me for one of my daughters not long ago. You see, the patience it takes to do that kind of work.

MB: Well, that is beautiful.

Ashley: I have a daughter in Salt Lake and one in Burbank, California, and my two foster daughters here, Mrs. Adams, and Mrs. Preece, Carma Preece. You see, their mother was my wife, my third wife, but she was with me for thirty-five years. She did all my copying of patriarchal blessings, right up almost to the last.

Now there's two things that have never been cataloged, as far as I know. I think this was about 1893. My brother, George, and a man by the name of George Freestone and Charlie Weist were in Vernal after 8 o'clock at night and Weist wanted to get a hat. He got a hold of Enos Bennion, whose father was the chief financier of the Ashley Co-op, and Enos was willing to go in and find a hat, if possible, for Charlie Weist.

Now in those days, in the east side of the Ashley Co-op, that Ashley Co-op is where the main store [was] here in town, well anyway, there was a ladder up on the north wall. All the hats they had to sell were always kept on the top of the shelves. Enos was up on the ladder by those shelves, handing hats down to Charlie Weist. Because they went in, they left the door unlocked, the front door, and two men came in. Evidently, they had been preparing to come earlier, but everything was locked up, but they come in now because the door was open. When they come, they shouted, "Throw up your hands, ta da, da da, da da!" Enos Bennion was up on the step ladder and he said, "What in the hell for?" to throw up their hands. The man shot a .45 revolver, just shot right up, and, of course, Bennion got off the ladder and this man ordered him to unlock the safe.

Now, he hadn't locked the safe, he expected to do it before he went home, but he hadn't locked the safe, and there was two drawers, one for the west side of the building and one for the east side, and there they were loaded with all kinds of money—gold, silver, and paper money. So one of those men took one of the drawers in his hand and the other took the other one and went out, left.

Now, Bennion didn't know how close to eternity he had been when he was on that ladder because that bullet went within an eighth of an inch of his head. It cut the band on the outside of his hat, but it didn't cut the sweat band. And that bullet went right up that close, within a quarter of an inch of his head. They had that hat hanging up in the office for years.

Now, when they got out, when the robbers got out, they took off out of Vernal right straight toward our house. See, our place was just a half a mile straight south of town. They didn't dispose of their drawers that they were carrying until they got to our place. Then they had a sack, one of them had a sack somewhere, he was carrying it. They emptied the money out of the drawers into this sack, right west of our house. Then the fellow shot, they thought to warn somebody that knew about it, and threw the drawers down at the side of the road. In the morning, when one of my brothers went to turn the water, there was \$16 in dollars, halves, quarters, dimes, and nickels. Sixteen dollars lying at the side of the road because evidently they got a little anxious to get away and weren't careful how they emptied that money out of the drawers into the sack.

Now, that's never been told. The three boys, George Bartlett, George Freestone, that's the bishop's Freestone son, and Charlie Weist, young fellows about the same age, they saw all the performance. Now when the robbers went to the vault, if they had noticed, there was a dusty-looking sack, but there was \$50 of gold money in it. They never looked at that, they just took the drawers that had been brought in from the store and one took one and the other took the other.

Then the other was when a family, I can't remember their names, but two brothers heard that in Dry Fork Mountain ore had been found in some rocks and two brothers were up there at camp and was going to pile on the ground. But these two boys were camped there and they started—the fellows was going to break in—started shooting at them and soon killed one of the men, one of the brothers, and the other brother got his gun and he tried to bore a hole right through a tree where those men were protecting themselves, but finally he quit shooting at it and they left. Took him right down to town here, and this man was Matt Warner. Matt Warner walked all around town here with his gun on. Of course, he came right to the sheriff and told him, he said, "There's a man up there that's dead." I've never seen that in print, but maybe it has been. But anyway, he goes walking around town here as big as anybody, any citizen.

Of course, the sheriff didn't dare try to arrest him because he would have had trouble right now. But the sheriff's brother, the sheriff was John Pope, one of his brothers, by the name of Marcellus Pope, [was] a young man about twenty-six years old. He come to his brother and said, "John, if you'll deputize me, I'll go and arrest Matt Warner, because he won't talk to you, but he will talk to me." So John said, "I'll do it." So he went and he said to Matt, "Now, some of the citizens are getting to the point that something is going to happen. It would be a nice thing if you boys, you and this other man, would come and go down to jail. You can take your guns with you, we don't care about that, but show us that you recognize that you have rights as well as everybody else." And so those two fellows came and went into the jail.

After they got into the jail, Matt said, "This is just nonsense." And so they took their guns off and gave them to the sheriff. Well, just the minute that the doors were locked against them and they didn't have any weapons, there was a guard put over the jail, several men. They had learned that a number of questionable characters were staying at a house way up in the northeast corner of the valley, a place called Harry Yarnell. They kept watch of that crowd because they wanted to know if they were still here.

So, two or three nights later, Pope came with his horsemen and took the two men out and went way off out west and then came back around Dry Fork and came down and went up over Taylor Mountain and over to this town on the railroad. Well, and there they got on a train and went. When they got to Ogden, they sent a telegram back that they were safe.

Now, that is all the excitement that I could ever put up with. What we youngsters were in conference, what might happen, what might happen, what might happen. Then a thing happened that was so laughable that we enjoyed that as kids. Matt Warner picked up a broom that had a black handle and pointed it at a man that was related to the sheriff and said, "If you don't get out of here," now, remind you, he was in jail and he was pointing a black broom handle, and this fellow took to his heels. Well, of course, he didn't know, I don't know if Matt had hewn the wood till it looked like the barrel of a gun, I don't know. But anyway, this man that ran, ran all the way home, didn't stop.

MB: He was probably afraid of getting shot.

Ashley: Now, we kids knew that and we used to play bad men, robbers, get sticks to imitate that. But that was one of the excitements of those days.